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A Dark Diplomatist.

By Gray Allison.
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"Deed, Miss Marjia, I don't like dese heah flats."
 Aunt Debbie stood with arms akimbo, occupying the greater part of the tiny kitchen. Mrs. Blair, arranging a mass of dahlias in an old fashioned jar on the dining room table, smiled on the old negro commiseratingly.
 "We don't find it quite as roomy as the old place in Virginia, do we, Aunt Debbie? But after the mortgage was foreclosed Lesley's civil service appointment was a godsend. I don't know how the child ever got the idea of standing a civil service examination. She always was a queer child, though." Mrs. Blair sighed as if the



DR. FENTON NOTED HIS PATIENT'S PULSE matter was beyond her comprehension and followed her characteristic tendency to avoid troublesome thought.

Aunt Debbie beat the batter for her cake energetically.
 "Miss Lesley—she's every bit quality—every bit a saint angel," she said, bristling at any idea disparaging to her nursing. "Dey's never been a purtier child nor young lady neither than little Miss Lesley. En' de ldy of ma chille wurkin' for her bread! I jest can't seem to stomach it!" She beat the substance in the yellow bowl viciously.
 "Tain't lack her ma and her grandma done befoah her. Dey had close and parties and married de best catches in de country. What chanst has little missie to make a fine marriage, I wanter know? Goes to work evry mawnin' at 9. De Lawd knows, I useter jes' be carryin' her ma's and her grandma's coffee to they beds at 9. En how's she a-goin' to meet any senators and presidents and things to get a chanst to marry?"

The old mammy beat away as if she had fate in the yellow bowl and intended to render it harmless.
 "It worries me dreadfully, Aunt Deb." Mrs. Blair finished the dahlias and stood off to admire them. "It seems preposterous to think that a daughter of mine should ever be an old maid. We've been here a year, though, and Lesley hasn't become acquainted with a single man of desirable calling acquaintance. It would have been so different if her poor father had lived."
 "Or if he hadn't gambled away and drunk up all his money foah he died," muttered the old woman under her breath.

Mrs. Blair sat down in the easy chair and took her embroidery from the ancient mahogany sewing table.
 "Well, I'm doing all I can. I insisted on renting this flat in a fashionable neighborhood, but the house is filled with young married couples that I've never met. I don't believe there's more than one eligible man in the building, and we've never met him."
 "Huh! Who's he?" demanded Aunt Debbie, scenting a prospect for match-making with as much eagerness as if she had been of French instead of African ancestry.

"It's that young doctor in the first door front. He seems to have all the swell automobiles and carriages in town stop at his door. But, no matter how desirable an acquaintance he might be, we don't know any one to make the necessary introduction—and we are never sick." The mistress laughed at the old woman's falling expression.
 "I seen him look at Miss Lesley anyhow when we pass him in the hall. Huh! It's enough to make any one sick to live in a ole handbox of a flat," said Aunt Deb dolefully.

Dr. Fenton came in very late that night and was smoking a final cigar when his telephone rang.
 "Please come up to apartment No. 31—quick—it's a fainting fit—or something dreadful!" said a girl's excited voice.
 When he reached the door of the apartment the girl with red blood hair—the same girl he had often noticed in the hall—met him at the door. Her face was still flushed with sleep, but her eyes were dilated with anxiety as she wrapped the folds of her blue kimono around her slender figure and led the way toward the little back bedroom.

"It's my old colored mammy," she said breathlessly. "I never knew her to be sick before, and I'm afraid it's apoplexy or heart trouble or something. If mammy were to die we would be absolutely helpless."
 Dr. Fenton noted his patient's pulse and listened to her heart, then looked at Mrs. Blair in a puzzled manner.
 "Her heart's all right—rather unusually strong. Has she been eating anything that might give her acute indigestion?"
 "I'm sure I don't know," said Mrs. Blair helplessly. "I was asleep when she called me, and she groaned several times, then became absolutely unconscious."
 "Has she been drinking?" The doctor sniffed the atmosphere suspiciously.
 "No, indeed!" said the girl indignantly. "Mammy never was intoxicated in her life. I spilled that on her trying to force some down her throat."
 The doctor, after several minutes' work, finally held some strong ammonia to his patient's nostrils, and she opened her eyes.
 "Take dat dar stuff away," she said indignantly. "Do you want to kill me jes' 'cause I's a wuthless old nigger?"
 Dr. Fenton patted her shoulder indulgently.
 "There—there—I guess you are not dead yet. It's a sign of a good constitution when they recover and begin fussing and fuming. Shows they have grit enough to pull through all right. Where do you feel bad, auntie?"
 "In ma head and back, and ma haigs, and an awful misery in ma stomach. I reckon I'm mos' done for," and she groaned in self pity.
 "I'm going to give you a powder that will stop all the misery, auntie. You must stay in bed tomorrow, and I'll come in and see how things are going with you. I expect you have taken cold and have neuralgia and cramp. You'll be bustling around as lively as anybody in a few days."
 "Be sure to come tomorrow, doctah. I'm scairt plum to death," the old negro whimpered.
 One night long after Aunt Deb's recovery Dr. Fenton sat in the tiny parlor of Mrs. Blair's apartment, and a casual observer might have thought he was noting Lesley's pulse.

"And to think I saw you going in and coming out of this building for a whole year before I had an opportunity of meeting you. I tried my best to find a mutual acquaintance, but couldn't. If that blessed old mammy hadn't caught cold I might never have known you. Do you like the way that diamond is set, dearest?" he asked, holding the girl's slender hand at arm's length to admire the very new and glittering ring.
 "It's just—lovely," she said. "Everything is lovely. I don't believe there's a single disagreeable thing in the world. Let's call Mam Debbie—I haven't told her yet."
 When Aunt Debbie came to the door and heard their news she laughed in an enjoyment too large for the small apartment.
 "You think you are su'prisin' your old mammy, do you, little missie? Lawd, chille, I seen it comin' long befo' you children thought of it."
 When she reached the seclusion of the kitchen she sat down and rocked to and fro in silent merriment, her checked apron held over her face.
 "Thank de Lawd! Little missy won't be no old maid," she chuckled, "but dey certainly is one cullud pesson dat would ha' made a fine actress. An wasn't I cute to select a time when little missy would put on dat blue fluffly wrapper? I knowed she looked like one of de Lawd's angels in it. I didn't have no misery—I didn't have no nothing—but dem powders sho' did make me sleep."

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